Article concerning David Hrdlicka, Lost in Laos 1965

10/05/98 REDACTED IAW McCAIN BILL (b)(3)

[TFR 199-1]

A DEVELOPMENT
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Mother America Will Hardly Recognize...
by Yurij PANKOV

"... I have at my disposal documents and tape recordings of testimony of an American flier." - [A quote by] Dehvid Luis Khrdlika, who was shot down over the Sam Neua Province (Upper Laos) on 18 May, 1965. In April, 1965, US Air Force Captain Dehvid Luis Khrdlika arrived with his unit to the American airfield at Takin (Thailand). After two combat flights, during which his unit bombed roads, bridges and other targets on DRV territory, he and others received a new secret order - to bomb an area of Upper Laos as marked on a map... On the return flight, after the bombs had already been dropped on peaceful Laotian towns, Dehvid Luis Khrdlika fell into the hands of patriots. He didn't understand that he had committed a crime by participating in the dirty, unannounced war against the Laotian people. ("The American War Against Laos". "Pravda", 27 August, 1967, author Ivan Shchedrov).

Dehvid Luis Khrdlika did not return from Vietnam and still today is listed as an American military "missing in action" from the war in Southeast Asia. No one knows anything about his fate.

The only person who could have related any of the details of the American pilot's disappearance would have been Ivan Shchedrov, a Pravda correspondent. However, Shchedrov died in 1981 at his writing desk in the paper's Paris correspondent's office. Therefore the secrets of the publication in the August issue of Pravda remain unrevealed to this time.

Since the fall of 1991 the issue of Russian military involvement in the disappearances of US soldiers and officers

has been discussed in Russian newspapers and on radio and television. This issue concerns the combat fields of World War II as well as the Korean, Laotian and Vietnamese fronts. In connection with this matter, notices appeared in Moscow newspapers, announcing the fact that families of Americans who are missing in action or still in captivity are prepared to pay out 1 million US dollars for any information on them. However, so far no one is claiming this money.

Meanwhile, many Russian researchers are studying this problem. One of them is General Anatolij Khor'kov. He is now retired but, just a few months ago (this past spring), he was Deputy Director of the Military History Institute and had access to practically all Russian archives.

"I definitely know that American citizens were detained under various pretenses in Stalinist camps and jails during World War II. Up until two years ago this was still a closed matter and practically no searches were conducted. But now many things have changed. It is difficult to trace the fate of American prisoners, though it is possible

[TFR 199-1a]

to do so, since there are documentary materials in the Russian archives and I am familiar with many of them. However, to fully study all of them and present them to the American public will demand a great deal of time.

In those years, prisoner of war registration was done very carelessly. Therefore, even figures in

documents of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs are of a contradictory nature.

According to information in the NKVD archives: for November, 1944 there were 23 American prisoners in Soviet camps; for May, 1945 there were 39; for June, 1945 there were 40; for May, 1946 there were 67.

Part of the prisoners were sent to worker battalions, which were used for public works projects. Registration there [in the worker battalions] was conducted very poorly and often wasn't done at all. The NKVD received no information regarding the nationality composition of the worker battalions.

References to prisoners are also found in documentation

of individual military units. In the "Report on the Movement and the Presence of Allied Prisoners of War and Interned Citizens" of the Second Byelorussian Front's Department for Repatriation Affairs, there is data on 1013 American prisoners for the month of May, 1945. That is only for one front. Of course not all prisoners ended up in camps. But those who were of interest to Soviet intelligence, i.e., those who served in aviation, headquarters and intelligence, were not returned.

If the issue is specific places of detention of American soldiers and officers, they were located on practically the whole territory of the USSR. Through documents which I found in the State special archives, I know for certain of 30 such camps: Krasnogorskij No. 27 - 1 person, Syretskij No. 62 -1, Morshanskij no. 64 -1, Asbestovskij No. 84 -1, Georgievskij No. 147 -1, Voroshilovgradskij No. 144 -1, Cherepovetskij No. 158 -1, Radinskij No. 188 -4, Vladimirskij No. 190 -1, Donbasskij No. 280 -1, Minskij No. 168 -1, Bobrujskij No. 56 -1, Sredne-Volzhskij No. 215 -1, Lisichanskij No. 125 -1, Gorlovskij No. 242 -3, Sestrorepkij No. 211 -1, Kaunas No. 24 -2, Novozybkovskij No. 327 -1, Leningradskij No. 339 -1, Mshenskij No. 466 -1, Dettyarskij No. 313 -1, Smolenskij No. 218 -1, Yaroslavskij No. 282 -1, Krymskij No. 241 -1, Dnepropetrovskij No. 315 -1, Melitopol'skij No. 419 -1, Odesskij No. 159 -1, Polotskij No. 243 -1, Valginskij No. 287 -1, Rakverskij No. 292 -1."

In General Khor'kov's archives there is one curious document of the Red Army General Staff dated 19 January, 1943, number 923. It is a report from the Chief of the External Affairs Department of the USSR People's Commissariat, Colonel Evstigneev, to the Chief of the General Staff, Colonel-General Vasilevskij. The report concerns a letter addressed to [Evstigneev] from five interned American fliers being detained on USSR territory in the city of Okhansk, Perm' Oblast. Here is the full text of the letter:

[TFR 199-1b]

"Dear sir! We are following with great interest the heroic struggle of the Red Army. Every Soviet citizen must take great pride in its achievements. The longer we sit here idly following the war, the larger in each of us, we five internees, grows the feeling of uselessness in our mutual struggle. They have held us here in the Soviet Union already nearly a year. Now, as the forces of our own country are being pulled into the struggle more and more, I know that we could be put to much greater use, in Africa, for example, than we are here.

A qualified bomber crew is still needed; of that I am certain. Considering these circumstances, don't you feel it possible to free us for active combat somewhere? If that is absolutely impossible, then we would like to be used here, for example, for preparing crews for the American aircraft which you have here, or for assault crossing preparation. I am appealing to your sense of reality. Don't you think that under similar circumstances the Japanese would keep a German crew, which had landed in Japan after bombing Soviet territory, under guard. I don't think anyone would believe that.

Sincere wishes for success in the new year.

Respectfully, US Army Major - York

These fliers are most likely the crew of an American bomber which made a forced landing in the USSR in

April 1942 following the completion of a combat mission over Japan. Their names and fates remain unknown up to this day.

Meanwhile, correspondent "i" found the following document in the Tambov Oblast archives:

TO THE HEAD OF OPERATIONS FOR CAMP No. 188

MAJOR (STATE SECURITY) COMRADE YUSICHEV

In accordance with the GUPVI (Main Directorate for matters concerning prisoners of war and interned citizens - "1") instruction and USSR law No. 78/27 dated 28 April 1945, all French, Alsatian, Luxembourger, American and British POW's will be concentrated in your camp.

In connection with this, all POW camps of the GUPVI NKVD USSR have been given the instruction to send the POW's, who belong to the nationalities listed above (approximately 2,500 personnel), to your camp via a specially guarded passenger train within a one month time frame.

We propose

that you prepare the camp immediately for the arrival of 2,500 personnel (French, Alsatian, Luxembourger, American and British) who will be arriving shortly.

Report when you have fulfilled this instruction to the OPVI, UNKVD, Tambov Oblast by 15 May 1945.

HEAD OF TAMBOV OBLAST UNKVD

COLONEL (STATE SECURITY)

(Leshuk)

Traditionally in the USSR (and currently in Russia), the nationality of an individual is determined not by citizenship but by ethnic background. In this manner, for example, if a POW had an

Italian first and last name, the NKVD would have definitely entered him on the list of Italian POWs, regardless of which army he served in. There are also instances involving Lithuanians who had immigrated to the US or France around the turn of the century. They fought against Hitler's army and wore the uniforms of the country for which they fought. The NKVD inevitably "processed" them like Soviet citizens who had fought in a foreign army.

Thus, the notation "nationalities" in the previously cited documents cannot give us a realistic representation of the true nationalities for the 2500 prisoners of war. This confirms once again the simple truth that if we try to discover traces of American POWs in Stalin's camps, it is necessary to study every documented reference which mentions "French, Alsatians, Luxembourgers, Americans, and British" POWs in minute detail.

But these are all the events which took place nearly half a century ago. Finding the people mentioned above does not seem to be possible, just as there is little or no chance of discovering our compatriots who are missing in action from World War II. (However we note: we Russians gave up on them long ago; yet the Americans are still ready to pay a million dollars for information about those whom their own relatives have possibly forgotten about. Such is America...)

Then came the Korean War. Here events occurred closer to the present time.

Valentin Sozinov, who is listed as the first advisor to the Chief of the General Staff for North Korea's

armed forces from December 1950 to October 1952, testifies that,

"During the time of my service in Korea, I had a number of opportunities to deal with American POWs. I remember only one last name since this happened so long ago. He is (RANK) (NAME) [typed in English "(NAME)"], who incidentally, is Russian by descent. His F-86 aircraft was shot down in the summer of 1952 in the area of Fan Syu, southeast of the Korean-Chinese border. The pilot, under the cover of fighters, flew to drop magnetic bombs on a strategic bridge across the Yaloudzyan River, connecting China and North Korea. But our air force did not allow him to approach it. An air battle began, and the F-86 was shot down. (NAME) ejected. However while landing, he fell at the base of a hill: the parachute got caught up in a gust of wind and the pilot injured his right knee. I was there at the time.

At that time, Soviet forces were not on Korean territory. Only our advisors and instructors were there. The force was situated as such on Chinese territory not far from the Korean border. Therefore, (NAME) was transferred to China to the city of Andun. My association with this American consisted of the following. We were sitting in a bunker and saw an aircraft crash. The parachute deployed. The pilot drifted to our side. I didn't just sit and watch. I got in my vehicle and drove to the crash site.

He had light brown hair, was lean, above average in height and had a nice face. He was very sociable. He was an air wing commander for the 5th Air Army. We seized him and at first, before the exchange in the force, we took him to a field hospital. There it

[TFR 199-2a]

turned out that he spoke Russian. It also turned out that his ancestors were emigres from Russia, from the vicinity of Saratov.

There were many other meetings as well. In the winter of 1953, another American pilot was shot down. He landed successfully. He had a radio beacon which he used to let his forces know where he was located. A helicopter came to his rescue. Watching these events transpire, we decided to leave the pilot in peace. We didn't want to start a battle. The helicopter approached. Then something happened - perhaps, the helicopter pilot noticed us? - and the aircraft flew away, leaving the American prisoner to us. We, of course, captured the pilot on the ground and shot down the helicopter.

Thus, we ended up capturing five fliers, the pilot that ejected from the aircraft and the helicopter crew. I do not remember their names. They were sent to Andun as well."

General Sozinov concedes that any one of these Americans could have been transferred to the Soviet Union. His suspicions are especially great in relation to (RANK) (NAME)

There are many doubts concerning the others.

"There would have been little sense in transferring rank and file troops", Sozinov believes. "From the standpoint of the information they had, they were of no value. But (NAME)was a (RANK), commander of an air wing, and was of real interest to our intelligence."

There is still another noteworthy piece of evidence. Upon the request of "i", "Radio Russia" appealed to its listeners from anyone who knew something about American soldiers located at any time in places of confinement on the territory of the USSR. We cite one of these responses.

"I - Kazerskij, Nikolaj Dmitrievich, born 1924, my address: 109462 Moscow, Volzhskij bul'var, 31, complex 1, Apartment 44...

I knew one such American, whom we had in the concentration camp "Zimka" Vozhael'skij Directorate of the NKVD, Knyazhpogostskij Rajon, Komi ASSR. The head of the camp was Major Simonov.

It was the winter of 1951-52... A pilot joined us in the camp, medium build, thin, light hazel eyes, dark

hair. He was born, if my memory serves me correctly, in 1924 or 1926. He was imprisoned for 10 years.. I found out that he was one of three pilots shot down in Korea, who were transported to the USSR, and had already been dispersed throughout various camps of the Vozhael'skij Directorate. In the camp he worked for us in the shop making fence boards and frames for hothouses. However in March or April 1952, he was taken somewhere else. Where - I do not know. Senior Lieutenant Kaplun, head of the special section of the camp, sent him away. It would be worthwhile to ask him some questions directly.

Sincerely yours - Kazerskij."

Placing the history of American wars and the fate of Americans who became MIA during those wars in chronological order, the investigation logically progresses to events which took place during the Vietnam war period.

Meanwhile, this period is objectively the most difficult to investigate because of extremely limited access to materials from the

[TFR 199-2b]

Soviet special services which operated in Vietnam (and in other regions of Southeast Asia). The archival facts of the KGB and the Ministry of Defense during the period of the 1960's and 70's still remain closed to any examination or verification by independent, non-government expertise. It seems to me that this occurs specifically because of the total lack of interest in this matter by the highest ranks of the KGB and Russian Defense Ministry, whose careers chronologically began at the time these events were taking place. Accordingly investigating the fate of those American prisoners of war, whom the special services were able to question in Vietnam and transfer to the USSR, becomes increasingly more complicated.

At the same time, it is known that an employee of the counterintelligence department, First Chief Directorate of the KGB, USSR, Oleg Hechiporenko, interrogated an officer of the CIA who was held prisoner in Vietnam in 1973. He officially confirmed this in an interview last year with the Joint Russian-American Commission searching for American prisoners of war who were unaccounted for during the Cold War era, starting from 1946 until approximately 1990. The person in charge of the entire operation was General Oleg Kalugin, who, as he stated to an "i" correspondent, wanted to recruit the American, release him back to America and use him as an information source at some point in the future. During the interview, Kalugin discussed a well-known point in the history of Soviet foreign intelligence, the recruitment of captured British officer, Dzhordzh Blejk, during the Korean War. However, at the same time, the Foreign Intelligence Service does not state any details of this event.

Another item of note... There was a closed door session of the RF Supreme Soviet subcommittee which deals with the prisoner of war issue. During the session, headed by subcommittee chairman Yurij Smirnov, the committee listened to testimony from a major in the Russian army who conducted an independent investigation of the situation involving American prisoners of war. Yurij Smirnov related several details of the discussion [with the commission] to the "i" correspondent.

"There is not much that I can say about the major; he is 30 years old. He serves in Ekaterinburg in the air-defense forces. Having found out that American POWs may have been shipped from Vietnam to the USSR, he proceeded to do some elementary investigative work. He met with the retired military personnel, who went through Vietnam, and talked with those who were responsible for the Vietnamese operation here in the Soviet Union. Naturally, they could confide better to a man in a uniform, who was one of their own, thus there was no need to keep any secrets from him. As a result, he succeeded in

[TFR 199-2c]

meeting the man, who told the history which interests us.

I have something further to add. Insofar as it does not violate the obligations our subcommittee has to the major and because it does not hinder our further work... In the fall of 1967, a so-called "window", a place

where movement across the border was accomplished without border troop control or eyewitnesses, was created at the Soviet-Chinese section of the border. At least two covered vehicles carrying captured pilots passed through the "window". According to a person, who related all of this to our major, they were all American and that one of them was called "either (NAME), or (NAME)". He identified the last name of a USSR KGB officer, who had accompanied the vehicles, to us. Subsequently, the vehicles with the pilots were followed to Alma-Ata (the capital of Kazakhstan, in the years of the Soviet Republic. - "i"), then to the regional center of Saryshagan, and from there to the city of Priozersk. According to this version, American pilots who knew new USAF aviation technology were needed for information purposes. However, a very important question remains. If these people agreed with the "transfer" to the USSR, then they were recruited, - meaning, the KGB or the military still have the documents, from which it would be possible to find out: did the Americans provide the information voluntarily or were blackmail and threats used to coerce them into providing the information? Then, accordingly, it will be easier to find out the further fate of these pilots. It will be much more complicated, if they were simply coerced and forcibly transported to the Soviet Union. In this case, we could find out at least some information under one condition, that is if the actual Soviet participants in this operation would come forward.

...During the era of the Second World War, more than 10 million Soviet citizens were missing in action. We only know of about a few of them, that they are living somewhere in the US or Australia. Escaping a terrible regime, they preferred foreign soil to that of a homeland that to this day does not remember them. For the Americans the search for those missing in action, is a national priority. Could the sense of nationalism in this international country be stronger?

10/05/98 REDACTED IAW McCAIN BILL (b)(3)